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NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE. NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/WATERS

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TAGS: KWBG PGOV PREL PTER IS

SUBJECT: GOI REMOVES CONCRETE BARRIER IN SOUTH HEBRON HILLS

REF: A. 2006 TEL AVIV 01336

1B. 2006 JERUSALEM 00438

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles, per reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary. On August 6, Poloffs saw workers removing a 41 kilometer-long, 82 centimeter-tall concrete barrier between Shima and Karmel settlements in the southern Hebron Hills area. According to the Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI), the barrier was dismantled and removed per December 14, 2006 and July 24, 2007 Israeli High Court of Justice (HCJ) rulings. The route of the concrete barrier followed the original October 2003 separation barrier route, although that route was revised in February 2005 following an HCJ ruling. Palestinian residents in the southern Hebron Hills area and human rights organizations argued before the HCJ that the concrete barrier isolated 5,000 to 7,000 Palestinians from the rest of the West Bank and placed them in a "seam zone" between the concrete barrier and the separation barrier. End Summary.

Barrier is Removed

12. (C) On August 6, Poloffs drove along Route 317 in the southern Hebron Hills area and witnessed cranes removing a 41 kilometer-long, 82 centimeter-tall concrete barrier between Shima and Karmel settlements. According to B'Tselem, the workers started removing the barrier July 30. On August 6, PolOffs saw portions of it loaded, block by block, onto flatbed trucks and taken away. ACRI reported that five of the 41 kilometers of barrier remained as of August 7, and by August 9, B'Tselem's Hebron fieldworker reported that all of the barrier was removed.

13. (C) Removal of the barrier followed a July 24, 2007 HCJ order that the GOI dismantle and remove it by August 6. The court also awarded ACRI, Rabbis for Human Rights, and Palestinian villagers 30,000 NIS in damages.

Construction and Impact of the Barrier

14. (C) Construction of the barrier began in early 2006 after the IDF issued military orders to confiscate 58 acres of land in the southern Hebron Hills region to construct a barrier. The concrete barrier's route resembled the original October 2003 route of the separation barrier, although this route had been revised in February 2005 following an HCJ ruling. According to local residents, the construction placed 5,000 to 7,000 Palestinians in a "seam zone" between the concrete barrier and the separation barrier.

15. (C) According to Peace Now, residents were required to pass through various gaps and gates along Route 317, some

several hours away on foot, in order to access roads to Israel and/or the West Bank. They were also required to cross Route 317 to reach a road leading to Yatta, a town of 20,000 that provides the area's Palestinian villagers with medical care, employment, school and markets. (Note: Palestinian vehicles are permitted to use Route 317, although access from smaller roads is often closed. End Note.) According to ACRI, the combined effect of concrete barrier and the separation barrier was to isolate 80,000 dunams of land and 21 Palestinian communities from the rest of the West Bank.

Reaction: Small Step, Long Way to Go

¶6. (C) During an August 9 meeting, B'Tselem's Hebron fieldworker told PolOff that the removal of the concrete barrier is a small step forward in improving West Bank access and movement. He added, however, that Palestinian residents in the southern Hebron Hills area are among the hardest hit in terms of settlement expansion and freedom of movement.

WALLES